

Prayer: Wonderful Savior, please help me to use this newly revived springtime season to revive a newness in my heart, my home, and in my life. Help me to be more loving, generous, and thoughtful. As I live day by day, remind me of the beauty of spring, and what new beginnings mean. Place those in my path that need help. Present me with situations where I can support others, teach me what to pray about, and give me insight on when to show compassion. In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.

“A SPRING BREAK ENCOUNTER WITH GOD”

Spring is always a beautiful reminder of the possibility of new beginnings and fresh starts. As you reflect back on the past months, what are some things you can (or need to) let go of in order to enable you to begin experiencing the freedom God has for you?

For me, daily quiet time in God's Word has been lacking because of busyness. But here is the good news—His mercies are new every morning. Just as Spring reminds us, new beginnings are always possible with Jesus, even when things seem far beyond hope. Because God has unquenchable grace for us, we need only turn, let go of the past, and embrace a new perspective—a fresh look at the future and all the wonderful possibilities it brings, free of failures and disappointments.

Spring is a metaphor for change. Some changes we eagerly await, and some we dislike. Some changes we plan and others arrive uninvited. To all these changes we ask the gift of God's perspective beckoning us to expectation, hope, and rebirth.

The sunlight and the rain remind us that You are at work renewing the earth. As a God of renewal, you are ever at work in our lives, too. We ask that our eyes be opened and our lives allow the needed changes to occur in our lives during this Lenten Spring Break. Awaken us to new life and perspective, for we pray in Jesus' name.

Spring break may bring various memories of youth adventures, or those college kids parties. After surviving a cold winter, spring break is a time to get away and enjoy yourself in a warmer water welcoming climate.

Whatever your interests are, that's what drives where spring break will be. For some spring break may mean indoor activities and a flight to Europe or a trip to Vegas. If you like the outdoors, spring break can mean beaches or skiing or golf. Not all people want to take it easy, though.

Those persons that are in better shape than their counterparts, look for adventure like zip-lining, scuba diving, mountain climbing, hiking and skiing. If they're in good shape, not too much stops them.

But as people age, they are looking for something different than party-hardy younger crowds or even families with children. They want to have fun, but still want to remember the good times they had. Most of us have had those college spring break trips and have graduated to new experiences.

For us in the Midwest, with our harsh winters, spring brings the chance to throw open the windows and let in much needed fresh air. Closets are relieved of clothes designed to provide warmth, in favor of lighter-weight attire. Bags and boxes are filled with items no longer needed — to be sent to a thrift store or set out for a Saturday morning garage sale. The same need exists for the soul.

Each Lent brings with it an opportunity to reassess our faith. The challenges of the prior months — especially after so many months when, almost from day to day, it was impossible to tell if masks would be required, hospitals would be overrun with those suffering from COVID-19 variants, churches would be open or travel permitted — need to be reviewed, the impact measured and integrated.

Old concepts may need to be discarded, in light of the turmoil faced. The question asked of God since the first mention of COVID-19 on the news — "Why?" — still may have no answer. How can faith continue to grow and flourish when, at almost every turn, the future seems so uncertain?

Above and beyond COVID-19, family, work and other considerations can shake faith to the core. A Lent Spring Break is the perfect time to let in some fresh air, blow away the spiritual cobwebs of inaction and laxity, and renew the soul.

As with a physical spring cleaning, necessitating the need to get rid of excess "stuff," the soul also must be freed of ideas that weigh down faith.

I like to quote the late comedian George Carlin, whose stand-up routine about "stuff" still makes me laugh at its innate truth. A house, he explains, is just a place for us to keep our stuff. As we get more stuff, we need to buy a bigger house, so we have a place to put our stuff.

On a physical level, moving to a larger house is feasible (though cluttering it with a lot of stuff not advisable). For the soul, the more practical option is to spend Lent in quiet, listening to that gentle voice that reaffirms what we believe, so we can move past outmoded ideas and unclutter our faith.

Each human being is on this earth for a limited amount of time. The goal for each life is to use our gifts and do the best we can to share God's love with one another. All the rest is like trunks of old clothes discovered in the attic: nice to look at, but basically useless.

Theology on a grand scale attempt to "humanize" God, to create a relatable being with qualities similar to our own, but superior, infinite. The very idea of God belies such a viewpoint. It is so difficult for a human brain, for instance, to wrap itself around the notion that, for God, all time is but a moment. Authors, filmmakers and other creative sorts have tried to imagine such a scenario — often uplifting, humorous or dramatic — but, essentially, impossible to conceive.

That's why, as we try to simplify our spiritual lives in this Lenten Spring Break, we should let go of heavy theological ideology and focus on the divine love that permeates all creation, allowing the soul to reflect that love, both in how we treat our planet on which we reside and how we interact with other human beings. We can look past the nitpicking details and be vessels of compassion, caring and generosity, regardless of who we meet, where we are, or what we're doing.

Unfettered from complex aspects of theology, the soul will be free to soar, free to listen, free to love — the simplest, and most meaningful, expression of faith that will shine like a beacon for others to take to heart and bolster their own faith journey.

- Imagine taking a Spring Break from the over-eating and over-drinking and experiencing instead what it means to be hungry and what it means to be filled with what's good, healthy and nourishing for body and soul. And imagine the money you might save on a "vacation from consuming" and how you might use that money to reach out and serve those in need.
- Imagine taking a Spring Break from the couch or from a chair in front of one of your screens (TV, computer, tablet, smart phone, Wii, Xbox). Imagine vacationing from the machines that mesmerize and manage our time and spending it with real people. Imagine a vacation that moves us from relating to machines to relating with human beings.
- Imagine a Spring Break from your schedule, your planner. Imagine setting aside a half hour (or even an hour) every day to do some of the things you really like to do, the things that nourish you, the things that bring you peace, the things that feed your mind and heart.
- Imagine taking a Spring Break from the sounds, the voices, the music, the media, the background noise that is everywhere around us. Imagine a vacation with moments of quiet, even silence. Imagine just sitting still for a while every day, or walking in a peaceful place. Imagine that in the silence that you might speak with God in prayer.
- Imagine taking a Spring Break from wasted time and unwise pursuits and finding time to get to the spiritual things you want to do but never seem to get around to. Imagine a vacation that draws you closer to your community of faith and its life.
- Imagine a Spring Break from all the busyness that keeps you from reaching out to others. Imagine making the time to call or write someone you should have been in touch with months, even years ago. Imagine making the time to get together with the people who bring out and nourish the best in you. Imagine going to Piggly Wiggly, Pic N Save,

Sendik's or Aldi's and shopping only for groceries to bring to church for the food pantry or Karl's Place (homeless shelter). Imagine having the time to attend more carefully and personally to those in need in your family, at school, at work and in your neighborhood.

- Imagine taking a Spring Break from your bad habits: over-indulgence, gossiping, self-concern, jealousy and envy, junk entertainment, grudges long held and resentments carefully kept. Imagine asking God's forgiveness for all these things.
- Imagine a Spring Break that refreshes your heart, cleanses your soul, opens you to God's grace, brings peace to your relationships and wisdom to your choices... Imagine taking a vacation at the end of which you find yourself more the person God made you to be and more the person you want to be...
- Imagine a Spring Break that ends with Easter and the joy of leaving behind what gets you down, wears you out and drains your soul. Imagine a Spring Break that brings you peace that lasts.
- Lent's Spring Break began on Ash Wednesday but it's not too late for you to come along: Easter's only three weeks away. Take a Lenten Spring Break - we all need one!

Let's embrace that new perspective today. Let's commit to growth together in Christ. Let's be consistent in our walk this month, and allow our faith to strengthen.

My prayer for you during this Lenten Spring Break is that you will experience the favor of God in your life. May things turn around and work out for your good. May your tears transform into joy and laughter because the good Lord will grant your heart's desires. May you be consistent in your walk with Christ and your desire to grow closer to Him.